

Reflections in this Season of Danger.

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A
S E R M O N

PREACHED in the PARISH CHURCH of

CLAPHAM, in the County of SURREY,

On SUNDAY, APRIL 15, 1798.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE AUDIENCE.

By JOHN VENN, M.A. K

Rector of Clapham, and Chaplain to Dowager Viscountess Hereford.

L O N D O N :

Sold by F. and C. RIVINGTON, N° 62, St. Paul's Church-yard ;
EGLYN and PEPYS, Chiswell-street,
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M,DCC,XCVIII.

MEMORANDUM

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T.O .
THE INHABITANTS
OF
THE PARISH OF
C L A P H A M,
THIS SERMON
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY
INSCRIBED
BY THE AUTHOR.

STREET, N. Y.

NEW YORK

1877

W. H. BROWN

NEW YORK

1877

BY THE AUTHOR

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Author of this Discourse is fully sensible of the impropriety of making the pulpit a stage for political discussion. Religion is degraded, and the sacred office of a Minister of Christ is prostituted, when the preacher employs the influence of Religion to stir up the flame of discord or to serve the purposes of a party.—He begs leave therefore to state, that it is the object of this discourse to recommend union and the renunciation of party distinctions. He exhorts indeed to a vigorous defence against the common foe; for he apprehends that Religion not only permits but enjoins us to defend our property, liberty, and lives against the attacks of violence. In our present resistance of the enemy's invasion also, the interests of order, of morality, of christianity are deeply concerned. The present is a new period, nor should the exertions it requires be measured by ordinary rules—our ALL is at stake—when the house is on fire it is every person's duty to give the alarm.

The

The Author hopes that he shall not be charged with rashly obtruding himself upon the public, in complying with the request of the very respectable audience to which this discourse was addressed. They were pleased to think that an attempt to excite the public spirit, deserved a degree of attention beyond the limits of the congregation to which it was directed.

A
S E R M O N, &c.

ECCLES. vii.—14.

In the Day of Adversity consider.

“MAN, being born to trouble, as the
“sparks fly upward,” must expect to meet
with many days of adversity, in which the
reflection recommended by the royal preacher
in my text will be suitable to him; particu-
larly will it be useful in the day of *public*
adversity. Public adversity bears an appear-
ance more alarming to a serious mind than
private, for it seems to indicate more evidently
divine indignation. Its effects are awfully ex-
tensive. It attacks the young as well as the

old, the poor as well as the rich: none are exempt from it by their lowness, none secure by their height. Its baneful influence tends also to destroy the ordinary sources of consolation—where sufferings are general, they leave to few the ability to afford assistance; they extinguish in many even the will; they tend to render the heart selfish, and sensibility callous.

The present is eminently a day of public adversity. A tempest has arisen, which from a small beginning, “as it were a man’s hand,” has increased and spread, till it has covered the face of the heavens with blackness. It has burst with terrible destruction upon the nations around us. The works of art, the labours of commerce, the palaces of the great, the forts of the strong, the sacred mounds of government, and the holy temples of God have been levelled by it with the ground, and lie in ruins before it. Hitherto it has spared us. It has passed by on this side and on that—but now it seems to bend its course towards this island. “In the day of adversity consider.” Suffer me to assist you in pointing out proper subjects for consideration.

The

The *reality of the danger* is a point to be considered ; for unless we are convinced of this we shall not seriously prepare to meet it.— Many, I am aware, still conceive that we are in no danger. The long course of prosperity with which we have been favoured, and the signal deliverances which Providence has been pleased to vouchsafe to us, seem to have rendered it as difficult as it is painful, to form a conception of national adversity. But surely it argues neither knowledge nor prudence, to attribute stability to human affairs, or to deny the existence of danger. Transitory and fading is all human glory ! Tell me where is the spot on which Nineveh, on which Babylon, the queens of the east, once held their court ? Where now is the sceptre of Egypt ? Where the Persian monarchy ? What is now the commerce of Tyre ? What the wealth, the arts, and the science of Greece ? Where is that proud and gigantic empire of Rome, which with irresistible strength ruled over the whole earth ? Are not all these, like masses of mouldering ruins, only monuments of the uncertainty and vicissitude of earthly grandeur ? Who that has read history, who that has pondered upon the ways of Providence, is not convinced

convinced that neither wealth, valour, nor wisdom can always shield the states that possess them from the common lot of mortality? Consider also that the present is a period, in which convulsions shake the political world to its centre, and by which the oldest and most established governments have been overturned.—A period in which the lust of innovation has seized the minds of nations, and a spirit of insubordination has diffused itself through all ranks of society. Consider likewise who ordained, and who directs this storm. Is it not God, who has arisen out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth; and when his judgments are abroad, have *we* no cause to tremble? Have we been so holy a people, have we served God so faithfully, have we made so good a use of our prosperity, and of the signal mercies with which God has blessed us, as to *deserve* no punishment? Can we believe that a righteous Providence punishes guilty nations, and say that we have no cause for fear? Such considerations may justly alarm the presumptuous; but if you still retain your confidence, say upon what is it founded? Upon our wealth? But “riches profit not in the day of wrath.” Upon our valour?

valour? Yet the boldest and most warlike nations have been subdued. Or are we inspired with confidence by the weakness of our enemy? Never before did England encounter an enemy so powerful, so energetic, so persevering, and so inveterate. Or is it in our invincible navy we trust? But we know that the vigilance of fleets may be eluded; an adverse wind may render them useless; a violent one may disperse them.—Which way then shall we look in order to discover sufficient ground for security? Shall we turn our eyes to our sister kingdom? Here I suppose we shall see little to justify presumption.—Shall we direct our sight to the continent? There we discover only the extensive coasts of enemies covered with troops eagerly waiting to embark against us? Shall we then confine our observation to our own country? Yet here the prospect is dark and gloomy. A debt enormous, taxes increasing in number and burden, commerce beginning to languish, and disaffection ready to welcome the enemy. Surely he must be very bold, or very ignorant, who can survey this prospect, and affirm that we are in no danger.

But

But along with the reality of the danger, let us also *consider the magnitude of the calamity* that threatens us. Let us for a moment suppose, however painful, however improbable I trust the supposition may be, that our enemies should succeed in the attempts which they make against us ; for, in order to judge of the degree of resistance which we ought to make, it is necessary to form a just estimate of the evil against which we struggle. To see our fields dyed with blood, our country laid waste, our towns sacked and villages burnt, to behold our magistrates murdered, and our sons and daughters exposed to the insolence and brutality of a licentious soldiery. — These would indeed be dreadful spectacles ; yet these would be only the common evils of war.—More must be expected by us. We must consider, that whatever pretences of fraternity, of liberty, of happiness, our enemy may hold out, it is our *utter extermination*, as an opulent, a great, or a free people, which he really intends. It is our prosperity, our wealth, our commerce, our navy, our colonies, our rank amongst the nations of Europe, which have excited his envy. *We* are the grand obstacle to his ambitious views. Could he
destroy

destroy us, he remains the lord of the world. Should he succeed therefore in his designs, we must expect to see our wealth totally exhausted by forced contributions, numerous and insolent armies quartered upon us to oppress and consume us, our ships of war carried to grace the triumphs of the enemy's ports, our seamen employed to transport our commerce to his marts. We must expect to be humbled to the lowest state of meanness and misery, till jealousy itself shall judge us to be beneath notice.—Nor is this all: hopes, dearer than life, and virtues far more honourable than riches, must be sacrificed to his impiety; our churches must be profaned, our ministers banished, our sabbaths abolished, the consolation of Christian hope must be denied us, profligacy of manners and dissoluteness must be established by rule and system, and our children be educated in such principles, and trained up in such practices, that, rather than witness them, it would be far better for parents to follow their offspring to their graves. In a word, the awful denunciation delivered against the Jews might in that case, with but too much reason, be applied to us: “Thou shalt be cursed in the
“ city

" city and in the field. The Lord shall send
 " unto thee vexation and rebuke in all that
 " thou settest thy hand to. Thy sons and
 " thy daughters shall be given unto another
 " people, and there shall be no might in thy
 " hand. The fruit of thy land and all thy
 " labours shall a nation which thou knowest
 " not eat up, and thou shalt be only op-
 " pressed and crushed always. The stranger
 " that is within thee, he shall get up very
 " high and thou shalt come down very
 " low. He shall be the head and thou shalt
 " be the tail; and thou shalt become an
 " astonishment and a proverb among all
 " nations *."

The representation which I have given of
 the reality of our danger and of its greatness,
 is not intended to create unnecessary terror.—
 It solely aims to remove that fatal security
 which takes no precautions against danger,
 makes no exertions, nor humbles itself under
 the lifted arm of the Almighty. It is difficult,
 I own, to determine what is a proper degree
 of alarm. There may be a fear which ener-
 vates, which produces a listless despondency,
 and

• Deut. xxviii.

and tends to accelerate the approach and increase the magnitude of the evil. Not so that salutary and prudent foresight of impending danger, which takes a just and impartial survey of it, in order the better to meet it with adequate resources. With such a view, let us, convinced that our ALL is at stake, turn our attention to *consider our duty*, and the *means of safety* at the present crisis.

I connect duty and safety together, because in fact they are far more nearly allied than many persons may imagine.—Danger is ever produced by deviation from the path of duty, and security is only obtained by returning to it.

Consider then the *primary cause of this evil* which is come upon the world.—It is sin which has produced the just indignation of a righteous God—his displeasure therefore must in the first place be studiously averted by us. Now this can only be done by our sincere humiliation and radical reformation. Let each individual then consider, that his guilt has excited a part of God's wrath; and that it highly becomes him to testify, by his actions,
that

that he is humbled for it.—Let him then consider what he ought to do.—Cannot he honour God, by reading his word more attentively and seriously; by keeping his sabbath more strictly; by attending his ordinances more devoutly; by avowing his regard to his authority and providence more openly; by setting on foot an effectual reform in his own family, and countenancing every scheme for the public reformation of manners?—Above all, let us remember, that “all things are naked and open to him with whom we have to do.” It is not the multiplying of ceremonies, or the increase of devotional duties which he seeks: but the rectification of the heart, and the purification of the principles upon which our lives are conducted.—A reformation which does not extend its influence over every branch of our conduct, is no reformation in his sight.—This then is our first duty at the present important crisis, this will be our principal security, to turn to God with our whole heart.—Till we do this, we only administer palliatives, and trust in vain refuges.—A general reformation would be a surer defence than the wisdom of statesmen, or the valour of armies.—And in this way

way the aged, the indigent, and the infirm may afford no contemptible assistance to their country.

Having considered the duty we owe to God in this day of adversity, let us also consider *that which we owe to our country*—And surely this requires us to use every possible endeavour to resist the impending calamity.

But here I meet with an objection which well-disposed persons have sometimes urged. “ Since the extraordinary revolutions which “ have taken place, and are now taking place “ in the world plainly manifest the hand of “ God; since it is evident that Providence “ must have some important ends to answer, in this general destruction of antient “ civil and religious establishments, may we “ not be found to fight against God by our “ resistance? and since we have seen all attempts hitherto made to check the torrent “ fruitless, may it not be our duty to yield to “ inevitable necessity, however afflicting; at “ least not to take an active part in opposing “ it?” They who adopt this mode of reasoning do not seem sufficiently to have considered

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the distinction between the *secret intention* and the revealed will of God.—Our conception of the secret intention of God should in no case be considered as the rule of our duty; and for this good reason, because we can never sufficiently ascertain it.—His revealed will, on the contrary, is certain, and the path of our duty clearly marked out by it.—Besides this, in many cases, the duty prescribed by the Almighty and his secret purpose may oppose each other.—He may enjoin us to do, what he intends should *not* be crowned with success. A fever attacks you with violence; it may be the intention of the supreme disposer of all events that it shall be fatal to you—but are you, if you should conceive this to be his intention, to yield to it without resistance?—Would it not be a species of self-murder, to decline using every remedy in your power to preserve your life? It was the secret purpose of God that his son should be betrayed into the hands of men; nay this purpose had even been revealed by the prophets; yet our Lord declares, “Wo to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born*.” It may

* Mark xiv. 21.

be the determination of God that your neighbour should be brought into circumstances of deep distress, in order to humble and sanctify him—but are you therefore warranted to dispense with the plain duty of benevolence?—Are you authorized to shut up your bowels of compassion, and to stand by an indifferent spectator of his sufferings? It may be the will of God that a famine should scourge a guilty nation—are you therefore justified in withholding your corn? Are you required to co-operate with the purpose of God? Are you not bound in duty to *oppose* it by every means in your power? The law of benevolence, in succouring our neighbour, is of indispensable obligation. The duty of self-defence is clear and explicit. Whatever therefore be ultimately the designs of the Ruler of the world, our obligation is clear, to assist our country, to defend our lives and property by all just and lawful means, and to fight, if needful, in defence of all that is dear and valuable to us, and without which life would become an existence of misery and degradation.

Let us then, at the call of our country, and in obedience to duty, unite together, as
one

one man, to resist the common enemy.—Let us use our influence over others, to kindle in them zeal for the defence of our liberty, our privileges, and our religion, 'till the flame spreads from man to man, from village to village, from town to town, and the whole nation glows with the ardour of true patriotism.

But, in order to the successful prosecution of this design, it is necessary that we should *consider the obstacles against which we should guard.*

Let us guard against *a spirit of discord.* Jealousies and contentions are the bane of every good design. If ever there was a period in which it was the duty of every individual to drop political distinctions, it is the present. The question is not now, who shall hold the reins of administration, or what measures are the best adapted to the welfare of the country; but shall we be *slaves* or not? shall we have any liberty, any property, any religion left to us?—In comparison of the importance of this question, how trifling are all the disputes which have hitherto agitated the political world. Let us then cordially unite. That
man

man is an enemy to his country, who at such a time as this labours to sow the seeds of discontent and division.—Let us avoid party names and distinctions, and agree to ward off the common danger.

Let us guard also against a *timid spirit*.—The time calls upon us to stand forward openly, and exert ourselves vigorously. The timid bring upon themselves distant evils, by not opposing them: they fear to take an active part against the enemies of their country, lest they should be marked by them, in the event of their success, and suffer the effects of their resentment.—What an unworthy principle does this argue!—What! shall we tamely suffer our country to be laid waste, provided we may be spared? Shall we purchase a base security, either at the expence of the blood of our countrymen, or of a dishonourable refusal to oppose the enemy? Fear however is a wretched politician: its contrivances are as foolish as they are mean. And therefore it generally happens, that those who have sacrificed their principles for the sake of preserving their property, or personal security, are compelled afterwards to part with both,
with

with this additional mortification, that they are degraded in their own eyes, despised by man, and abandoned by God.

Let us then be persuaded, that neither obscurity nor perfidy will shield us. The storm which now rages knows no distinctions. It equally demolishes the palaces of nobles and the cottages of the poor *. It lays waste the lands of

* Some of the lower classes have supposed, that since they have little property to lose, they could not be materially injured by the success of a foreign invasion. Whoever, they say, holds the reins of government, we must equally continue to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow.

But have they considered, that nearly one-half of the labouring poor would, in case of such an event, be probably thrown out of employment? I suppose that nearly half of our poor are employed in the various branches which depend upon our commerce, or result from its success. Were our enemies to succeed, I consider that this commerce, and the wealth which has flowed from it, would be almost wholly cut off. For, be assured, that it would neither be the interest nor the design of our ambitious rivals to *suffer us to exist as a commercial people* any more. Their prosperity must be built upon our ruin. What a scene then of universal bankruptcy and poverty must take place! A great part of the artificial wealth which we possess, and which at present serves to give support to so great a number of the poor, consisting in funded property, in houses, ornamented gardens, rich furniture, would then be of no use to afford subsistence to the labourer. To what then must he have recourse for support? There would be no wealthy

of those who favoured, as well as of those who opposed its progress.—It is folly, it is madness to suppose that you can stop the fury of

capitals engaged in manufactures, no spirited improvements carrying on in agriculture, no arts flourishing. Let the poor consider that the wealth of the rich is spent directly or indirectly amongst them. A successful invasion would therefore, in a country, situated as ours is, cut off the resources of the poor as much as the opulence of the rich.—The loss which they would sustain from the failure of hospitals, and of the various charitable institutions with which our metropolis abounds, would by no means be a small one; as well as from the decay of poor's rates, which, if not totally annihilated, could not extend to the degree to which our opulence now allows them to be carried,

The effect of the sudden stoppage of a single branch of commerce has been very awfully exemplified in the case of the watchmakers. It appears by the report of the benevolent committee who undertook to solicit relief for them, that in a single parish (St. John's, Clerkenwell) there were the following persons, by failure of employment, reduced to total want, viz.

Workmen	1100
Wives or Mothers	886
Children	1945
Apprentices	301
Total	<hr/> 4232

If such extreme distress has been produced by the sudden stagnation of one branch of manufacture, what must be the distress occasioned by the failure of every species of commerce, and the annihilation of the capitals by which it was supported.

But I trust the poor will be influenced by stronger motives than these, to join in the endeavour to repel the enemy.

Have

of the hurricane, and prescribe to it certain bounds within which it will be a calm.

Let us guard also against a *desponding spirit*.-- The evils arising from despondency are various. It tempts us to drown reflection in dissipation.

“ Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we “ die.” It prevents exertion, propagates dissipation, produces irresolution, abandons success.— Let us consider that, “ the Lord reigneth “ and the earth may be glad thereof.” If not so much as “ a sparrow falleth to the “ ground without his notice,” let us not think that an ambitious enemy can pull down and destroy kingdoms and nations at his own pleasure. “ In the Lord then let us put our “ trust.” He, who hath raised, can set bounds to

Have they *no stake* in their country? Nothing to dread in the loss of their religion; nothing to fear in the disturbance of public order and tranquillity, and in the destruction of moral principles? They have wives and daughters at least. The brutal treatment which these might suffer from a licentious soldiery, should fill them with terror. The miseries inflicted by the French armies in Franconia and Swabia upon the peasantry of those countries, who welcomed them in the expectation of receiving from them the liberty, equality and affluence which they had promised, were such as the most flinty heart cannot read without horror.

See the accounts by eye witnesses, printed for Cadell, Strand; and Bell, Oxford-street.

to the storm. With gratitude let us acknowledge that he has already appeared in our defence in a remarkable manner. I would not on account of his past mercies presume, but I would be encouraged by them to trust, with humble confidence, that he will be pleased to bless our endeavours in the way of duty. “ Be strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak. The Lord is with you while ye be with him, and if ye seek him, he will be found of you *.”

Let us also guard against *a selfish spirit*.— Never was there a time wherein it was more essentially a duty to encourage a public spirit than the present. But a public spirit supposes in its very nature a readiness to sacrifice private interest. What then shall we say to those who acknowledge the danger to be imminent, but yet are entirely engrossed by their private concerns, and will devote no part of their time or labours to the public weal? Is this the line of duty? Is this Christian conduct? Does not the scripture command us to “ look every man not on his own things, but also on the things of others?” Does it not charge that

* 2 Chron. xv. 2.

“ no man seek his own but every man another's wealth.” Christianity is of a noble and generous temper : she abhors selfishness. Our blessed Lord sacrificed even his own life for the good of others.—But if we still are determined to regard our private interest chiefly, have we no interests in what concerns the public ? What are the measures which the time now requires, but such as tend to give security to our property, and protection to our wives and children, as well as to preserve to us our liberty and religion ? Have we considered what is the tendency of indulging a selfish spirit at such a season as this ? Is it not to produce, as far as our influence extends, a criminal indifference, and a fatal torpor, which would augur the worst event for our country ? Let us shew then the prevalence of principle above interest ; let our meetings for the common defence, where required, be numerously attended ; let the plans entered into for the general good be carried into effect with alacrity and vigour ; let us each in our proper sphere * be willing to do what

* There are various ways, besides that of military service, in which a person may now be of use to his country.—Though his actual services may not be of much value, yet his example,
his

what we are able for the public safety. And if this cannot be done without some sacrifice of time, of trouble, or money, let us make that sacrifice cheerfully. Humanly speaking, we need to be under no apprehension, whatever be the power or rage of our enemies, if every one will come forward with alacrity and vigour to support, as far as in him lies, the common cause.

And lastly, let us in the day of adversity consider that there is *a refuge against the worst events*, which can befall us.

God is “a refuge.”—He is a very present help in time of trouble. If it be our chief and constant endeavour to obtain an interest in a saviour’s protection and care, we need not

his aid in diffusing the general spirit of patriotism may be of material benefit. An earnest wish to promote the general good will always find out some useful service. Thus in the beginning of the revolution in France, even the women materially contributed to promote the enthusiastic ardour of the troops, by voluntarily employing themselves in making camp equipage and stockings for the soldiers. The men, who were incapable of taking up arms, assisted in carrying dispatches, in collecting provisions, in preparing necessaries, &c. It is to the union and spirit of the people that we must now look for such impressions being produced on the enemy as will tend to procure a solid and honourable peace.

not fear. If we have made our refuge under the shadow of his wings, we shall be safe. We need not be "afraid of evil tidings; "our heart will be fixed, trusting in the "Lord." We shall consider that we are in God's hand; and that "the very hairs of our "head are all numbered." Whatever be the event, we shall have an ark in the midst of the flood; we shall have an inheritance that fadeth not away, and a kingdom that cannot be moved. Let us in the mean time walk steadily in the path of duty, however rough, however dangerous it may be; so that when God calls us, we may not be found wandering from it on account of its difficulty, or shrinking from the dangers which Providence call us to meet with courage.—"If God be for "us, who can be against us?" "Happy is he "that hath the God of Jacob for his help, "and whose hope is in the Lord his God, "which made heaven and earth, the sea, and "all that therein is; which keepeth truth "for ever*."—To this God we commit ourselves and our country; humbly confiding in his goodness, who even in the midst of judgment remembereth mercy.

* Psalms cxlvi. 5.

THE END.

